

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9658

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TAGS: SREF, SN, VM

SUBJECT: PRESS STORY ON RESCUE OF BOAT REFUGEES BY U.S. VESSEL

REF: SINGAPORE 0732

1. REFTEL REPORTS ARRIVAL IN SINGAPORE OF 55 VIETNAM REFUGEES PICKED UP AT SEA BY U.S. FLAG VESSEL GATEWAY CITY. REFUGEES WERE PERMITTED TO LAND IN SINGAPORE AFTER USG PROVIDED ASSURANCE TO SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT THAT THOSE NOT ACCEPTED FOR RESETTLEMENT BY OTHER COUNTRIES WOULD BE ACCEPTED BY U.S. FOLLOWING STORY, DESCRIBING REFUGEES' EXPERIENCE AT SEA, APPEARED IN FEBRUARY 17 ISSUE OF STRAITS TIMES.

2. QUOTE. FIFTY-FIVE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES, ON A FOUNDERING CRAFT AMIDST BLUSTERING SEAS OFF SOUTH VIETNAM, WERE RESCUED BY A CONTAINER VESSEL AND BROUGHT TO SINGAPORE ON WEDNESDAY NIGHT. THE REFUGEES -- 31 MEN, 11 WOMEN INCLUDING ONE PREGNANT AND 13 CHILDREN -- WERE HANDED OVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) AUTHORITIES AT SEMBAWANG PORT YESTERDAY. IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WILL BE KEPT HERE FOR A LIMITED PERIOD BEFORE BEING OFFERED RESIDENCE IN OTHER COUNTRIES. THE REFUGEES HAD SET OUT IN THEIR 12.2 METRE LONG FISHING BOAT, THE VUNG TAU, IN A FREEDOM DASH TWO WEEKS EARLIER FROM SOUTH VIETNAM. BEFORE LONG, THEIR FOOD AND WATER
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SUPPLIES RAN OUT AND THEY WERE WITHOUT NOURISHMENT FOR TWO DAYS DRIFTING IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA ABOUT 370 KM OFF THE SOUTHEASTERN COAST OF VIETNAM. ON TUESDAY AT ABOUT 4 P.M., THE GATEWAY CITY, THE WORLD'S FIRST-EVER CONTAINER VESSEL, ON ITS ROUTINE RUN FROM HONG KONG TO SINGAPORE SPOTTED THE FISHING BOAT AND ITS BELEAGUED REFUGEES. A CREW MEMBER FROM THE 9,000 GROSS TON SHIP, MR. WILLIAM MARLEY, 21,

A MESSMAN, SAID THAT THE REFUGEES FOR HELP AND WAVED A WHITE RAG. HE SAID THAT THE MASTER OF THE VESSEL, CAPTAIN GARY FLEEGER, PULLED ALONGSIDE THE BOAT AND STARTED RESCUE OPERATIONS. MR. MARLEY SAID: "THE REFUGEES SAID THAT THEY HAD BEEN WITHOUT FOOD AND WATER FOR TWO DAYS AS HALF THEIR SUPPLIES HAD FALLEN INTO THE SEAS DURING THE ESCAPE FROM VIETNAM. THEY SAID THAT THREE JAPANESE VESSELS HAD IGNORED THEIR DISTRESS CRIES, BUT A SINGAPORE VESSEL WAS KIND ENOUGH TO PROVIDE FOOD SUPPLIES. HE ADDED THAT THE REFUGEES, FROM THREE UPPER MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES, HAD ORGANIZED THEIR PERILOUS ESCAPE TO FREEDOM AFTER MONTHS OF PLANNING." AFTER THE GATEWAY CITY, OWNED BY SEALAND SERVICE, HAD BERTHED AT SEMBAWANG PORT YESTERDAY MORNING, UNHCR OFFICIALS TOOK THE REFUGEES IN TWO BUSES TO A LOCAL HOSTEL HERE. EARLIER, SEALAND TERMINAL STAFF AT SEMBAWANG PORT SHOWERED THE REFUGEES WITH DIAPERS AND OTHER CLOTHING FOR THE BABIES AND FOODSTUFFS WORTH MORE THAN \$300. UNQUOTE.
HOLDRIDGE

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